PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS
ON THE
BOOK OF RUTH

REV. M. C. HORINE A.M.

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PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

ON THE

BOOK OF RUTH.

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION

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To the Sorrowful and the Poor.

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INTRODUCTION.

The discourses that make up the little volume before us were prepared by a well-known Lutheran pastor for the members of his own congregation. They are based on continuous sections of the Book of Ruth; and they gain not a little advantage from the fact that they have for their foundation a portion of the Divine word so full of interest and so rich in material for useful instruction. A masterly discourse must have a great subject.

That the Book of Ruth is interesting is a universally acknowleged fact. The story it tells holds the attention from first to last. The characters it delineates awaken sympathy in all hearts. The pictures it paints are specially attractive and afford enjoyment to young and old, to cultured and rude. The scene in which Ruth makes known her unalterable purpose to cleave to Naomi, let come what will, is one of surpassing tenderness and loveliness. "Its exquisite and pathetic beauty," says Samuel Cox, "has been recognized from of old, and has inspired painter after painter, musician after musician; while Ruth's famous reply to Naomi's dis-

suasive entreaties takes high rank among the sentences the world will not willingly let die."

That the Book of Ruth is also well suited for useful practical instruction all competent teachers will admit. The facts it records embody principles and suggest lessons of rare value in giving direction and support in the various relations and situations of life. They serve a specially useful purpose in strengthening and sustaining the human spirit in seasons of misfortune and discouragement. The two women whose history is related are themselves exposed to a trial of unusual severity. They have lost husband and property. They are childless and friendless. Yet are they patient and hopeful, and willing to help themselves in every possible way, however hard or humiliating. For their patient endurance they are in due time rewarded with honor, peace, love, rest and abundance.

Now of these facts and principles our author has taken wise advantage, and has employed them with much skill in accomplishing the high and noble purpose he has in view.

As concerns the facts, he has presented them in a clear, connected and orderly way, and furnishes the explanatory information needful to enable the reader to bring them distinctly, fully and correctly before the mind.

The circumstance recorded in the 3d chapter, concerning Ruth's visit at night to the threshing-

floor of Boaz and laying herself at his feet, is one that is difficult to explain. Such able expositors as James Morrison and Samuel Cox admit this and say that the incident is of a nature to require very delicate handling. Notwithstanding, our author has disposed of this difficult and delicate subject in a wholly satisfactory manner, and has shown that there was nothing whatsoever in the conduct of Ruth that was improper or immodest, when considered and judged according to the customs of the times and the peculiar law that regulated the marriage of a childless widow to the nearest kinsman of her deceased husband.

As to the lessons which the facts are calculated to teach, these too are diligently pointed out and appropriately applied to the various circumstances and conditions of life. One of the avowed objects of the writer is to speak words of encouragement to persons in humble position, who, in addition to the depressing influence of straitened circumstances, are often still further exposed to the disheartening effect produced by the neglect and contempt of their more fortunate neighbors. This noble purpose is consistently kept in view, and many a word of cheer is spoken that ought to fill the hearts of the desponding with joy and hope and fresh determination.

That the author has gone over the whole book of Ruth in his expositions and reflections is a circum-

stance that strongly recommends his work to our favorable judgment. The Scriptures are too generally studied only in a fragmentary way and in detached portions. To their proper understanding and due appreciation, the books of the Bible require to be read and considered as a whole and in continuity. Thus only is it possible to perceive their general drift and purpose, and to lay hold of the clue that leads to a right interpretation of the several parts. Summing up, then, we are prepared to give it as our opinion that the writer of these discourses on Ruth was very happy in the selection of the Scriptures on which to base them—that in the handling of the facts and truths furnished him by his text he has accomplished the kind and benevolent purpose he had in view—and that he has given us a book that, by its valuable thought and its easy, flowing style, is calculated both to please and profit the reader. We commend it heartily to all, and especially to the young, and we sincerely pray that the blessing of the Lord may accompany it wherever it goes.

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PREFACE.

THE educated reader is furnished with a sufficient number of critical works on the different books of the Bible, but there is still room for other works on the practical lessons of the Divine Word, which may be useful alike to the learned and to those of more moderate attainments. In this direction the source of instruction and improvement is inexhaustible. The Bible is a perennial fountain which sends out a continuous stream of living water to refresh the thirsting souls of weary men. From this fountain every one may draw, without diminishing its fullness. Indeed, the Holy Scriptures are so full of meaning and so suggestive of important truths and duties that the thoughtful reader may find abundant material for practical and useful instruction. It was in this frame of mind that the author of this unpretentious book endeavored to read the charming story of Ruth. His aim has been to present his reflections in such terms as, first of all, to attract attention to this beautiful idyl and create an interest in it, believing that no better service can be rendered any one than to awaken in him a love of God's word and an inter-

est in its saving truths. He had a further purpose also of drawing attention to the virtues of Ruth, and of raising in the minds of others, and especially of the poor and lowly, a feeling of high self-respect, of unwavering faith in God, of cheerful hope in days of adversity, and of abiding conviction that true nobility of character, true piety and worth, may be found among those who tread the humble walks of life, as well as among the more famed sons and daughters of men. He believes that there is great need of the inculcation and fostering of such sentiments, especially among the poor and unfortunate of our large cities. The humble, and often the menial station which they are compelled to occupy, and the proud indifference and neglect with which they are so often treated by the rich and prosperous, tend to degrade such persons in their own esteem, to lead them to feel that they are of little account, and to cause them to lose sight of the fact that they have in themselves a sacred and priceless treasure which they are faithfully to guard and keep. No greater injury can be done to any struggling fellow mortal than to destroy his self-respect, and scarcely can a more valuable service be rendered him than to make him feel his manhood—or her womanhood—make him appreciate, amid the most adverse circumstances, the high endowments of soul which God has given him.

The author believes that this life is only the beginning of life in its lower stage, and the preparation for the higher and perfect life which is to have no end. To those who fear God and trust in Him, adversities and afflictions help to work a fitness for the greater glory and blessedness in the world to come. These adversities and afflictions are sometimes the forerunners of singular advancement to stations of ease and honor even in this life. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." It is often the way of Divine Providence to train and discipline, by trials and sorrows, those whom He intends to raise to positions of trust and honor. The very conditions of which we may complain, are just the tests and means by which a kind Father is qualifying us for higher and better things. To fail in this process of trial and training is to miss the great prize which is before us. If our thoughts are allowed to dwell too much on our present situation, so that we rate ourselves according to our poor and discouraging surroundings, we will be apt to underestimate ourselves, and fail to rise, through privations and sufferings, to the exalted place, either in this life or in the life to come, to which God designs to raise us. He would have the reader keep in view the great end of all trial and discipline on earth, and never forget the "glory, honor and immortality" which may be obtained in heaven. "It doth not yet appear what

we shall be." His aim is to hold the reader's attention to this sublime truth.

It is mainly with this end in view that these pages were written, and if what he has here said should inspire any heart which is oppressed with sorrow and the burdens and bitterness of poverty, to be trusting, cheerful, hopeful, courageous and virtuous amid all the discouragements and toils of a dependent, lowly life, the author will not regret the time and labor which he has given in their preparation. In the humble hope that they may be of some use to others, and bring some honor to God, these reflections are sent out to the public.

For the convenience of the reader, as much of the sacred text is printed on the page, or pages, preceding each chapter, as comes within the scope of that chapter. This arrangement will also assist materially in understanding what follows. The text is given according to the revised version.

M. C. H.

Reading, Pa., January 30, 1892.

ELIMELECH.

RUTH i: 1–5.

And it came to pass in the days when the judges judged, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-le-hem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elim-elech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Beth-le-hem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth; and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died both of them; and the woman was left of her two children and of her husband.

CHAPTER I.

ELIMELECH.

THE Book of Ruth is one of the brightest gems of sacred biography. It abounds in beautiful, touching and interesting incidents, and whilst it charms and pleases the reader, it at the same time instructs and improves him. It has all the attraction and interest of romance, whilst it has all the solid advantage of being real history. The principal character of this delightful Book is Ruth herself, whose excellent qualities, graceful conduct and varied fortunes invest her life with a romantic and an attractive interest. She was a woman of Moab, and was incorporated by marriage into the race of Israel. The Moabites were descendants of Lot, the nephew of Abraham. Though they were widely separated, at the time of this marriage, in their religion and hopes, they sprang from the same stock of people. They had the same ancestry, who resided, previously to the call of Abraham, in Mesopotamia. They spoke the same language and had the same social customs. Yet these two tribes of people had very little intercourse with each other. This was owing partly to

their political condition. These tribes, together with many others, were frequently at war with each other. At that time no *one* great power ruled Syria, and there was almost constant irritation and bloodshed between the various tribes which occupied that country. But the chief cause of alienation between these two kindred tribes was their religion. The descendants of Lot had become idolaters, while the children of Abraham retained the knowledge and worship of the true God. The descendants of Lot were excluded from the great promises of God, while the seed of Abraham possessed these promises. This was a source of jealousy on the one hand, and of pride on the other. Besides this, the spirit of the times was narrow and exclusive. The tribal feeling was very strong, and seldom were marriages contracted between persons of different tribes. They were very careful to preserve the pure blood of the ancestry which they severally boasted. All these causes operated to make these two races of people unfriendly towards each other, and to hinder them from entering into social relations with each other.

This being the case, how was the marriage of Ruth with an Israelite brought about? It came through the residence of Elimelech with his family in the land of Moab. Elimelech was of Bethlehem-Judah, a town subsequently distinguished as the birthplace of David and of Christ. His wife's

name was Naomi, and his two sons were Chilion and Mahlon. The cause of his removal was a famine in his own country. It occurred in the time of the Judges—most probably near the beginning of their rule over Israel. Circumstances point towards the time of Gideon, when the Midianites devastated the land and thereby caused famine. It could not have taken place late in the history of the Judges, as Boaz, who became the second husband of Ruth, was the son of Rahab, who had concealed Joshua's spies in Jericho at the beginning of the invasion of Palestine by the Israelites. As the residence of Elimelech lay near the boundaries of Moab, it was easy for him to migrate with his family to this neighboring people. It is questionable whether this movement was justifiable. As the head of a family, it was his undoubted duty to provide for his own house. But whether the necessities of the case were such as to justify him in removing among a strange people, and bringing his household into a community of idolaters, and depriving them of religious intercourse and ordinances among the people of God, does not appear. We are told farther on in this history that he "went out full." He seems to have been a prosperous man, and to have left his home not from a lack of the means of subsistence, but rather to secure his property from being plundered by the Midianites, who made occasional marauding incursions into

the land of Israel. It was not necessity that compelled this movement, but a desire to make ample possessions more secure. It seems to be an instance in which the removal was dictated by a worldly policy, without considering the social and religious bearings which were involved in it. The result of such a course is often the loss of both temporal and spiritual good. Like Lot, many remove to rich countries, "well watered," to lose all their property in the common ruin of the ungodly, while they suffer still greater loss in the moral condition and religious hopes of themselves and their children.

There are some good reasons why Elimelech should not have removed to the land of Moab. His family was small. He had but two sons, and these were grown up to the estate of manhood. If others could struggle through those times of scarcity, certainly he could have done so also. It only required the practice of a little self-denial. Besides this, his sons were both weakly. Their names, given them in their infancy, show that they were never strongly constituted—Mahlon, "the sickly," and Chilion, "the pining one." It was an unwise exposure of these delicate sons to remove from the healthful surroundings of their birthplace to which they were inured, into a country to whose sanitary conditions they were unused. This step involved not only a sacrifice of religious privileges

and influences, but also a risk of health and life, either of which is too valuable to be given in exchange for a little temporal comfort and gain.

The events of Providence soon revealed this truth to this unfortunate household. Elimelech, whose name indicates the religious convictions of his parents who gave it him, for it signifies "My God is King," soon dies and is buried in a land of strangers and idolaters. His wife and sons are alone in their grief—no friends being near to condole with them. Whoever has had this trial, knows how sad a lot it is to mourn over departed friends with no kindred hearts near to mingle their tears with his. But in time the sorrow of bereavement is somewhat alleviated, and the two sons marry daughters of Moab. Their names are given, and both are beautiful and expressive. In these names of a remote age, we can trace a delicacy of feeling and a parental fondness, so kindred to that which exists in our own bosoms, that the bare mention of them bridges over the long span of years and makes us feel our kinship with those people of ancient date and distant residence. Orpah, the "Fawn," was Chilion's wife, and Ruth, the "Friend," was the wife of Mahlon. But the joy of these two unions was of short duration. The bridal chamber is soon hung with mourning, for the two wives are ere long without husbands. Only the three widows remain.

Sad and desolate, indeed, must have been these three hearts. But two of them at least, Naomi and Ruth, found support and comfort in God. They recognized His hand in their bereavement and bowed in meek submission to His will. Though the sacred account does not tell us this, we infer it from what we know of their religious faith and character. The Old Testament saints had the most sublime faith in Divine providence. When their friends and property were taken from them, they could say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Perhaps there is no sorrow more painful than bereavement sorrow, and in no kind of affliction is God's word fuller of comfort and hope. It is a kind of sorrow which comes to us all. Death is everywhere. There is no circle, however bright and happy and favored, on which it has not cast its dark shadow. But there is strong consolation for all those who have confidence in the unerring wisdom and goodness of God. They know that what He does is best, and that He makes no mistakes. They are also confident that those who die in the Lord have gained the life eternal.

RUTH'S RESOLVE.

RUTH i: 6–18.

THEN she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab; for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread. And she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah. And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each of you to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Nay, but we will return with thee unto thy people. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say I have hope, if I should even have an husband to-night, and should also bear sons; would ye therefore tarry till they were grown? would ye therefore stay from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes, for the hand of the Lord is gone forth against me. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her God: return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me. And when she saw that she was steadfastly minded to go with her, she left speaking unto her.

CHAPTER II.

RUTH'S RESOLVE.

THE events related in the preceding chapter were indeed a sad experience for Naomi. In a few years she buries her husband and two sons. She is alone in her sorrow, excepting the tender sympathy of her daughters in law, who, though their real relationship had ceased with the death of their husbands, continued with her, and by their devoted love, soothed and comforted her, and lightened the weight of her affliction.

Under these mournful circumstances, it was but natural for Naomi to turn her thoughts to her kindred in her own land, and long again to converse with them, and to dwell amid the bright scenes of her early life, and of her former happiness. She heard that God was again gracious to her native country; that He had "visited it," and given them bread; and she resolved to return to it. She informs her daughters in law of her purpose. We may suppose that they endeavored to persuade her to remain with them. But her resolution to go back to the place of her childhood and youth could not be changed. She sets out with a heavy heart,

and they accompany her on her way. It is remarkable how they cling to her. Their conduct is not mere form or sentiment. It is the result of that conquest which the noble nature of Naomi had made of their affection. There must have been something in the character of Naomi which won and held the affection and devotion of her sons' wives. As her name indicates, she must have been "lovable." Her own sorrow had enriched her nature. She was unselfish and kind. She could mingle her tears with theirs over their common sorrows. She could comfort them with her sublime faith and hope in the living God. She possessed the charm of goodness, of love, of sympathy, and with these golden affections she bound to herself her new-made kinsfolk.

But a new trial now springs up in her path. She desires to do the very best she can for the two noble women who so lately were the wives of her lamented sons. She deems it best for them not to go with her to Bethlehem. She is herself poor. Their land, it seems, was mortgaged, and she may be unable to redeem it, or to find a kinsman to redeem it. She has no hope of obtaining husbands for them from among her own people. She herself might not live long, and then they would be without a friend or means of support in a strange land. She knew the bitterness of such a lot, and she would spare them the sorrowful experience of it.

She has no inducements at all to hold out to them to go with her, and is able to promise them nothing but poverty, hardship and toil. So she thoughtfully releases them from all feeling of obligation to remain with her. She is willing, for their own good, to forego the pleasure of their company and the comfort of their generous love and sympathy, and she counsels each to return to the house of her own mother, where they would be protected and cared for. It was a sad hour for them all, for they were united by very tender and strong bonds of sympathy and affection. Naomi addressed them in the most affectionate and pious terms, saying, "Go, return each to her mother's house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband [wishing them a second marriage]." Then she kissed them, "and they lifted up their voice and wept." No wonder they wept at the prospect of saying a last farewell to one who was so worthy of their affection and esteem.

But they promptly declined to return. Being unable to assist and protect them, and deeming it best that they should remain with their own kindred, Naomi again urges them to return, at the same time expressing her sorrow that she is unable to help them and give them a home, saying, "It grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of

the Lord is gone out against me." "And they lifted up their voice and wept again," and Orpah, "the Fawn," true to her name, "kissed her mother in law," and bounded away to her maternal home, while Ruth, the true "Friend," "clave unto her." Orpah went back to her own people, and here her name drops out of history. Ruth forsook father and mother, country and friends, to cast in her lot with the people of God, and her name is linked with that of the greatest king of Israel, and with that of the great Redeemer of mankind. In her noble act of self-sacrifice she honored God; and God, in accordance with His promise, honored her. No one ever lost anything by being true to God. He is able to reward His faithful servants, and He does reward them liberally.

The words—so familiar to Bible readers—in which Ruth declares her determined purpose to go with her mother in law, reveal the positiveness, the strength and the nobility of her character. What an earnestness and resoluteness of soul breathe in them! "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried." She resolves to share the fortunes of Naomi—to share her faith, her poverty, her general lot, whatever that might be. We

would not expect such grand sentiments from a person who has hitherto occupied so humble a position. The three widows weep together as Orpah says her farewell, and Ruth utters her sublime resolve to leave all and journey into a strange land. The picture is sufficiently gloomy. But the lofty spirit of Ruth suddenly shines forth, like a bright star in a dark night, and throws an imperishable light on the scene; and mankind in all ages since look on it with admiration and pleasure. There is a whole-heartedness in her resolve which presages greater things still in her career. Her mother in law held out no inducements but privations and toil. Ruth determines to share them with her. She will link her life and fortunes with those of Naomi. She will go where *she* goes, lodge where *she* lodges; she will dwell among *her* people, will worship *her* God, will die where *she* dies, and be buried with *her*.

Her decision of character is most admirable and worthy of imitation. Having made up her mind as to what was right and her duty in the case, nothing could turn her from her purpose. She had learned to know and worship the God of Israel, and she resolved to serve no other. She had chosen Him for her God, and she determined that she would be numbered with His people. This was the only course consistent with her convictions. She might have vacillated between con-

siderations of temporal comfort and ease and religious duty, and at last gone back with Orpah to her own people, but she would not thus surrender her faith and renounce her religion. She acted promptly and decisively. This was right. But how many, from worldly considerations, hold back their decision to confess Christ and serve Him! A sense of duty urges them on the one hand, and a love of pleasure and of the world holds them back on the other hand, and so they vacillate between the choice of God and mammon—unable to make up their minds fully whom they will serve. In a matter like this there should be no hesitancy. Once we know that God is the Lord, we should serve *Him*. We should suffer nothing else to stand in the way of our choice for a moment. And having once confessed the Lord, we dare not disown Him, no matter what the sacrifice or the duty which may be required. We must acknowledge and serve Him everywhere and always. Whatever step we take, and whatever choice we make, it must be done in the name of the Lord and in obedience to His law.

Ruth's constancy also deserves to be noticed. She was placed under a severe trial. Her filial love and her religious devotion were both thoroughly tested. Naomi's repeated request for her to return to her own people would have shaken the resolution of most persons. Had she been of a cer-

tain order of mind, she would have concluded that her company was not desired, and would have turned away, grieved and wounded, and gone back to her former home. But the strength of her purpose rose above any such feelings, if even they had been started, and she maintained her resolution to journey to the land of Judah. It was no small sacrifice which she had to make. She had to leave friends and country, the shelter and comforts of home, and seek a livelihood by her own exertions in a strange land. But to remain with her own people involved a relapse into idolatry, into heathen life and despair. In her choice between home and voluntary exile, between the worship of Chemosh, the god of Moab, and Jehovah, the God of Israel, she did not hesitate, nor did the sacrifices which this choice involved shake the firmness of her purpose. Having given herself to the service of God when circumstances were favorable, she remained steadfast in times of sorrow, self-denial and sore trial. Adversity could not move her from her pious resolution. It was not merely in the prosperous days of her wedded life that she maintained the religious faith of her husband, but she remained constant in that faith in the dark and trying days of her widowhood. She possessed the spirit of true religion. She was constant and faithful in the Lord's service. She persevered in well-doing amid all the difficulties and hardships of her life. She

was not turned back from the path of truth and piety by the sacrifices and duties which lay in it. In this she is an example to all believers. How many run well for a time only—run well so long as nothing hinders them, and are turned out of the way of life so soon as they meet with trials and difficulties. Our holy religion requires decision and constancy. We must have the courage to resolve and to carry out what we know to be right, and the firmness to maintain our faith and calling at any cost. We must labor, and not faint. In the words of the apostle, we must be "steadfast, unmoveable, ever abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labor in the Lord shall not be in vain."

NAOMI'S RETURN TO BETHLEHEM.

RUTH i. 19-22.

So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and the women said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty ; why call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me. So Naomi returned, and Ruth, the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab, and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

CHAPTER III.

NAOMI'S RETURN TO BETHLEHEM.

THERE are several incidents in the life of Naomi that are touching and interesting. Though she lived many years ago, her experience was so similar to that of thousands in every generation, that the incidents related of her possess a perpetual freshness and interest. How many have experienced as she did, the trial of leaving their native town, or village, or city, or country neighborhood, of parting with their youthful friends and associates, to go and reside with strangers. How many, like her, meet with misfortune and sorrow in the strange land in which they have sought a home. How many there are whose sad lot it is, as it was hers, to bury their kindred in some foreign country, or in some distant part of their own country, and then in loneliness and sorrow to turn their feet back again in the road to their former friends and home! Nor is that other trial wanting with many which she also had to bear, of going "out full," and returning "empty"—of leaving the happy scenes of childhood and youth, with high hopes and with unbroken family circle, and coming

back alone, with hopes crushed, and the dearest treasures of this life left behind; and all this sorrow and loss aggravated by the fact that the interest once felt in friends at home, and their interest in the absent ones, have been greatly diminished. Only those who have passed through such an experience can understand the severity of Naomi's trial and affliction, and appreciate the strength and nobility of her character.

We last saw Naomi in her great misfortune and grief in the land of Moab—bereaved of her husband and two sons—alone and destitute—about taking leave of her two faithful daughters in law, when Orpah kissed her and returned to her home and her idols, and the devoted Ruth "clave unto her," and refused to return. Seeing the unalterable purpose of Ruth to accompany her, she at last gave her consent, and the two women began their solitary journey. The loneliness of the way was, no doubt, greatly relieved by the company of Ruth, though her presence must have occasioned Naomi many anxious thoughts about the means of gaining a livelihood for one who was almost friendless and alone. Doubtless they conversed about these matters as they traveled onward, and while their thoughts were thus occupied their minds were diverted from their recent sorrows and misfortunes. Thus the difficulties and duties which circumstances sometimes force upon us serve as an anti-

dote to the griefs which otherwise would consume our strength, cast down our hopes, and paralyze our energy.

Journeying on amidst hopes and fears, they at last arrive at Bethlehem—the native town of Naomi. She is scarcely recognized by her former friends and associates, so changed and broken is she by her late sorrows and afflictions. Though absent only about ten years, the change which her reverses have wrought in her appearance is as great as that which ordinarily comes after the lapse of a longer period of time. She had become prematurely aged. The bloom had faded from her cheeks, the light of her eye had been dimmed, the elasticity of her step was lost, the erect carriage of her person was stooped, so that she scarcely resembled her former self, and her old acquaintances asked in surprise, when they saw her, "Is this Naomi?" Many of them asked this question in true sympathy with the fallen fortunes and sad losses of this sorrowful woman. They readily took in her lamentable situation, and felt deeply and tenderly for her. But there were, doubtless, others —we may hope, however, very few—who asked this question somewhat scornfully, being moved still with the envy which they felt in her days of prosperity, and with the feeling of disapproval with which they regarded her removal from their midst at a time of common calamity and misfortune. Of

course, they would insinuate by their question, "Is this the Naomi who was once so prosperous and comfortable—the Naomi who could not bear the discomforts which we all had to endure, and who, for the sake of securing greater quietude and ease, had to go down and live in the land of Moab? Is this the Naomi, who was once so well to do, and is now so destitute and dependent?"

There are those who find a grim sort of pleasure in the downfall of those whom they envy, but it is not the feeling of a noble and a generous mind. Such a temper should not be indulged. It is degrading to our better nature, it restrains us from those acts of kindness and mercy which we owe to the unfortunate and the afflicted, and it often hides from our view the noble and admirable virtues of those who have been deprived of their outward state of plenty and comfort. Besides, we ought to reflect that misfortune is liable to come to us all, and we should act as considerately towards others as we would desire them to act towards us in a similar condition. Thus we will learn how to behave ourselves towards those who have undergone sore trials and reverses.

The reply which Naomi makes to the question of her friends and acquaintances, reveals her humility, her submission to the Divine will, and her great strength of character. "And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi," that is "Loveable," "Call

me Mara," that is "Bitter," " for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full and the Lord hath brought me home again empty. Why *then* call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me." She throws no blame on any one. She expresses no feeling of resentment against those who may have exulted over her sore misfortunes. Her great afflictions have made her nature too deep and rich and charitable for that. Her sympathy for mankind is too tender and full to reproach those who have not learned those deep lessons of life which are taught in the school of adversity—lessons which displace petty spite and low envy with forgiving love and generous good-will, and lift the soul above the low plane of carnal thought and feeling. There is not a trace, either, of rebellion against the Providence which has dealt so hardly with her. All she says is the utterance of a pious, heroic soul, trusting in God, and patiently submitting to what He ordains.

The wonder is that we find such lofty sentiments from one occupying so humble a position in life. She seems to have held no higher rank than the average farmer's wife of Bethlehem. But she was not without that sort of training which brings out the loftiest qualities of mind and heart. She was a pupil in the school of Providence, and she had learned many valuable lessons which greatly ex-

alted and enriched her nature. Besides this, the brightest minds and the noblest hearts are often found in the humble walks of life, where the force of circumstances either represses or conceals talents and virtues which would otherwise shine and attract the praise and admiration of the world.

In the account of Naomi's return to her native town and to her kinsfolk, no mention is made of Ruth. All the surprise and remarks are about Naomi. The modest, noble-minded, sad-hearted Moabitess seems to be entirely overlooked. All the town is excited over Naomi's arrival, but not a word is said, good or bad, of the devoted friend who came with her with the settled purpose to make the land of Judah her home. It was scarcely courteous to make so little of the new kinswoman of their old friend. Besides, they were lacking in a proper zeal for the Lord, in not showing more interest in one who has renounced her idol god to serve Jehovah. These Bethlehemites might have done so much, at least, as to enquire who Naomi's companion was, and to bid her welcome, and throw a little light and hope on her sad path. But they did almost as well as many church people in our own day, when some sorrowing soul comes up out of the valley of affliction and goes up to Mt. Zion. Often no one inquires who she is, or speaks a word of welcome and encouragement, or gives a single look of friendly recognition, or does anything to

drive away sadness or brighten the new path on which she has just entered.

As a rule, Christians are too distant in their treatment of each other—especially members of the same church. Our social habits are somewhat exclusive. We hold all persons at a distance until we know them and ascertain whether we would desire their acquaintance. This is not wrong. Our own comfort requires this. But there is another circle which is not strictly social, but gracious, in which the higher relationship of the spiritual life rules, in which we meet as members of one family —as children of one Father—in which we may be friendly to all, in which we may sympathize with each other, and help and comfort one another. And this circle is the church of Christ. It is here that a great defect in our social life is met, and a great want of the soul is supplied. There are myriads of lonely people in our crowded cities—people who are strangers and sojourners—people who, though born and reared in the same place with us, never speak with us nor we with them—never hope to see us in our homes nor to hold any friendly social relations with us. We move in a different circle from them. Our tastes and circumstances separate us from them. But we see many of them in the house of the Lord. We meet in the courts of our common Father and Saviour and Comforter, before whom there is the perfect equal-

ity of all believers. Here we may greet each other without any social compromise, and feel the strength of the tie which binds mankind in a common brotherhood and realize something of the heavenly rapture of the "communion of saints."

At any rate, we make too little, ordinarily, of strangers who come into our neighborhood, or into the church. And we sometimes make unjust distinctions. The person in "goodly apparel" is likely to receive more attention than the one in more humble attire. But we may be sadly mistaken. The man is a vast deal more than the coat he wears, and the woman than the dress and jewels with which she is adorned. There is often very great worth in those of lowly mien. We know not the prominence which God will give them in carrying out His great designs. The dejected Moabitess, whom the women of Bethlehem passed by with indifference, became the grandmother of Israel's greatest king. So many a person coming into our midst as a penniless stranger, may become a useful citizen, an active church member—possibly a pillar in the church—and his descendants occupy influential positions in society and in the Kingdom of God. The little ragged boy brought into the Sunday-school may some day become a minister of the Word, or fill some other useful and honorable position in life. So the little girl, properly shielded and trained, may become equally useful and honor-

able in her own sphere of life. Persons are links in the great chain of God's providences, and *every* link is necessary—*some* are immensely important. Therefore no one should be overlooked by us, and especially as we know not which one will be chosen to achieve great things in the cause of truth and God. Let us take an interest in the strangers that are within our gates. Let us invite them to go with us into the house of the Lord. Let us make them welcome when they come. If we succeed in doing them good they will do us good in return, and God's name will be honored and His cause advanced.

We desire to offer one more reflection on Naomi's return to her former home. She came back poor and dejected. It was not her fault. Probably she had no desire to remove to the land of Moab. But Elimelech determined to go, and as a dutiful wife, she had to go with him. No doubt he meant it well, but he had miscalculated. He did not count on dying so soon. Everything went different from what he expected. There is a great practical lesson in this fact. Israel always stands as a type of the church, and Moab and all heathendom as a type of the world. Some trouble and discomfort at home led Elimelech to go down from the land of Israel to the land of Moab. A few years passed and he and his sons were no more, and his widow was so broken and changed by her sorrows that her

friends scarcely knew her. We may see in him a representative of any father who, because of some difficulty or offense in the church, leaves it and goes down into the world, taking his family with him. He does not mean to leave it for good—only while the famine lasts, while the stress of trial and discomfort is upon it—then he will return. And he goes down into Moab, and indulges worldly ease and comfort, and leaves the rest of Israel to struggle on as best they can. But, alas! afflictions come. Death enters the home. Perhaps that father is the first one to receive the fatal summons. Reverses then come. Fortune is swept away. Other afflictions are added. A remnant of the broken household, in their sorrow, now recall the good land from which they had gone out, and they resolve to return. They come back to the house of the Lord so broken and marred by the world's hard treatment that their friends scarcely recognize them. In surprise they ask, "Are these the people who formerly worshipped with us in this place? How changed they are! What trials and afflictions they must have experienced!" But all have not returned. Some are among the dead. Others remain in Moab, preferring the service of the god of this world to that of the God of Israel. The well-meaning father did not intend this when he took offense and left the church. But so it has resulted. O, the responsibility which rests on the heads of

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families! Their choice and actions involve the welfare or unhappiness of all the house. To turn the back on the church and go down into the world is a step towards death and misery from which a man may never be able to return. Many an Elimelech has gone down from Judah to Moab—from the church to the world—who never came back again, and he and his sons have perished there. Let parents beware how they act towards the church of God. To turn from it to the world is to put a slight on the Lord that bought them, and there are guilt and judgment in the very act. There is too much risk here. If the cross is heavy, bear it. Better be safe under it, than cast it away and perish. Who does not see that it would have been better for Elimelech to remain in Judah? It would have saved his property. It might have prolonged his life and the lives of his sons. It would have saved his poor wife unspeakable trouble and sorrow. And who does not see that it is always best for a man to abide in the church of Christ, and to keep his family there with him? It will be an advantage every way, and especially when death shall invade his home. Then there will be many to sympathize with him. Then consolation will be found in the word of God duly applied, and there will be the blessed hope of a better life to come. There are no comforts equal to those of religion. There are no hopes so grand and

blessed as those which are set before us in the Gospel. Death out of the church is indeed a sad event. But when it takes place in the church and in the faith, there is much to cheer and strengthen the hearts that are torn with grief. They sorrow not even as others which have no hope.

But nearly as bad as the fathers who go down from Judah to Moab, are those who are in Moab and remain there when all the blessings of the Land of Promise lie open to them to inherit and enjoy. It cannot be denied that many a father prolongs his residence in Moab until his children are grown up there—worldly-minded and irreligious—whereas if they had cast in their lot with the people of God their households would have done likewise. It is often the case that a father neglects church and continues to be a man of the world until his family is grown up, and then late in life comes into the Kingdom of God and laments that his children are without religious faith and hope. And often he pleads in vain for them to change their ways and serve the Lord. But it is too late. The right influence and example were not brought to bear in time. The habits are formed. The mode of thought is fixed, and it is only by special grace that the necessary change can now be brought about. Again we say to parents, Be careful what you do. You act not for yourselves alone, but also for your children. See that you are planted in

the house of the Lord and that they are planted there with you, and then abide steadfastly in the good estate in which you are, and strive to keep them steadfast with yourselves. Your own safety and welfare and theirs depend on your doing so.

The religious faith and hopes of children depend much more on the instruction and example of parents than is commonly supposed. The first and most potent impressions and influences are received in the family. The parents are necessarily the first teachers of the child, and they must set the current of its religious life in the right direction. Its plastic nature is molded by their precepts and example. God has put it in their power to determine, to a very great extent, the sentiments and character of their children, and to fit them for useful and honorable lives and a happy immortality. He graciously furnishes them with all necessary means and assistance. He makes it quite possible for them to fulfil the command to bring their children up in His "nurture." He supplies the word of truth to inform the judgment, to enlighten the conscience, and to determine the choice, and bestows His Spirit to regenerate and sanctify them, so that the agencies which are employed are invested with divine wisdom and power. Those who neglect the religious training of their children, deprive them of the highest and strongest motives for a life of well-doing, of the best safeguards

against sin and folly, of the most powerful supports under trials, and of an unfailing source of courage and strength to stand in the hour of temptation. But the natural, proper and right result of Christ nurture in the family, is membership in the Church, when the children arrive at a suitable age. Where this fails the legitimate results of the previous training have not been obtained. The religious nurture of the home, must have in view ultimate and practical membership in the Church. But this end can not be successfully gained, unless the parents themselves stand in living union with the Church. They cannot expect their children to live in Judah, while they reside in Moab. They must give right example. They must dwell in the House of the Lord, and have their children reside with them there.

GLEANING IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ.

RUTH ii. 1–3.

And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean among the ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter. And she went, and came and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on the portion of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.

CHAPTER IV.

GLEANING IN THE FIELD OF BOAZ.

IT was fortunate that Naomi and Ruth came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest. It seems that they were quite destitute, and that they had not yet any certain means of gaining a livelihood. Naomi had rich relatives, but they do not appear to have opened their hands to her very liberally. Boaz was evidently a good man as well as a rich man. Did he not yet know of her arrival? Or was he ignorant of her straitened circumstances? Or was he over-delicate about offering her charity? Whatever may have been the reason, she received no assistance either from her wealthy kinsmen or her old acquaintances and associates. It was a sad trial for her and her daughter in law. It was hard for Naomi to feel the pinch of poverty in her old home, where a decade of years before she enjoyed plenty, and for Ruth to find herself among strangers and God's chosen people, and her late husband's friends, with so little practical sympathy and encouragement. But under this fresh trial her character looms up with increasing strength and lustre. She is not

overwhelmed by her misfortunes and sorrows. She does not sit down in silent helplessness, and brood over her sad lot until she dies broken-hearted, but rises up with heroic resolve and says: "I will go and glean in any man's field, in whose sight I may find favor."

The right to glean was conferred, by positive law, on the widow, the fatherless, the poor and the stranger. But to glean behind the reapers could not be claimed as a matter of right, but of privilege only, of special favor granted by the good will of the owner. Hence Ruth proposes to go and glean wherever this privilege would be allowed her. The Divine law in regard to gleaning is this, "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of your field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of the vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger." In Deuteronomy, where this law is repeated, the widow and the fatherless are also named among those who are to be permitted to glean. This was one of God's provisions for the support of the poor and the helpless. It is a truth well worthy of notice that God has mercifully commanded that the poor shall be cared for. In the law given by Moses it is enacted: "The poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command

thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor and thy needy in thy land." That God lays particular stress on this duty appears also in the teaching of Christ in the Gospel. The main cause of the condemnation of the rich man in the parable is, that whilst he had abundance he cared not whether the wants of the miserable beggar lying at his gate were supplied or not.

Likewise, the ground on which the final sentence will be based on the great day of accounts, will be in accordance with the fact of our having extended or withheld charity from the needy and afflicted. An eternity of bliss or woe will depend on the alternative whether we *have* done it or have *not* done it "unto one of the least of these my brethren." This is a most momentous truth, and it should be weighed with the greatest seriousness and thoughtfulness. Our approval or rejection at the judgment depends on how we have observed or failed to observe its requirements. And the reason for this lies in a very deep and vital principle—in the presence of that love which marks us as the children of God, or in the absence of that love which proves us to be the children of wrath. To this effect St. John says: "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" "That matter, therefore, of sup-

porting the poor is a very serious one. It is a test of our faith and Christian character, and it will be a test of acceptance or rejection on the day of judgment."

We have no such custom among us as gleaning. Yet we have known it to be practiced in some rural districts. We have known manufacturers to allow coal-picking about their yards, which may be regarded as a species of gleaning. But these are exceptional cases. It is doubtful whether the privilege of gleaning would be practicable in our day. The bold and grasping, the unworthy, would reap the chief benefits of it; while the timid and the weak, the most deserving, would be thrust aside and deprived of their proper share. But we have abundant opportunities of bestowing on the poor the gleanings which we make with our own hands. We may minister to them personally, or through the many charitable institutions of our land. The point with us is that we do not first glean our fields, or shops, or other channels of industry and wealth —that is, gather up and save every fragment of that in which our income consists—and then keep it and use it for ourselves alone, and fail to give any part of it to the needy and the helpless.

But let us return to the conduct of Ruth and note whatever is excellent and commendable in it, and worthy of imitation.

She found herself among strangers. She was

poor, but not dependent, for she had a sound body and mind. More than this—she had a will to do something for herself. It is true, nothing very inviting offered itself for her to engage in. But she took the first and best thing she knew of, and it turned out to be the most profitable employment she could have undertaken. To her, poverty could not long be a burden. Her own energy would soon throw it off, and she would gain comfort and plenty by her own exertions. She was of too noble a nature to regard poverty as a disgrace. Our being poor or rich is often only a mere accident of birth or fortune. It has nothing to do with the honesty or integrity of a man. "God hath chosen the poor, rich in faith." Some of the noblest characters that ever lived were poor. Such were the apostles, and the Son of man Himself, who had not where to lay His head. Her spirit was too noble and hopeful to be broken with the reflection that she lacked many of the ordinary comforts of life. Though poor, her life was still honorable and desirable, and she would make the best use of it in her power.

The independence and nobility of her character are seen in her resolve to help herself. She did not propose to sit idly at home and plead that she was an entire stranger and did not know to whom to apply for employment, or excuse herself from following some useful occupation on the ground

that the wages were too small, and thus abandon all attempt at self-support. We hear no hint of her returning to her friends, that she might benefit by their sympathy and charity. But she bravely asked permission to go and glean wherever the privilege would be allowed her. This desire of self-support is very strong in many persons, and is to be encouraged and commended. Yet this is not the duty of all. There are social and domestic relations which demand the time and attention of many, and for the services which they render, they are justly entitled to a generous support. There are many whose lives are busy and useful, but receive no stipulated wages for their services. With such the spirit of self-dependence is not compromised, for there is the consciousness of valuable services which deserve liberal remuneration.

But the wisdom and piety of Ruth appear in her willingness to accept cheerfully the condition which Providence had chosen for her, and to perform the work which belonged to it. She had, it is true, little privilege of choice. There were very few avenues of industry open to her. Her need was urgent. She could not wait long for some easy and desirable situation. She had to take what then offered itself. But she did not shrink from it. The harvest was at hand, and she had to gather in her bread then, or lack for the rest of the year. The result of her endeavor, as we shall see hereafter,

was to make provision for her support during the rest of her life. The point which we desire to make here is, that she made use of her opportunity. Had she sat still and debated the possibilities of success or failure, or taken into account the disproportion between the toil and the meagre returns of a day's gleaning, her destiny would have been very different, and her life would have been a failure. She would have missed her one chance of entering upon a course which led onward to affluence and honor.

It may be truly said that harvest-time comes to all persons. Some gather in the ample fruits of agriculture, of trade, and of manufacture, while others are mere gleaners in the various pursuits of life. But if the prosperous do not reap an harvest, and the poor do not glean, neither one will obtain the means of subsistence which Providence has placed in his reach, and if they both lack a sufficiency, it is owing to their own negligence. Many persons have to begin life as mere gleaners, finding employment and sources of revenue as best they can, and receiving such wages as are offered—often too small, we know. But it is far better to be employed at low wages than to be idle. Occupation is a reward in itself. It is the road along which preferment, comfort and fortune lie. Our beginnings may be humble enough, but we know not the promotions which industry, virtue, attention and

capability may win for us. It was thus that a newsboy became proprietor, and then the widely known benefactor. The errand boy rises to the position of partner. The operative in a factory, the clerk, the teacher, is chosen to fill a high station in social life, in the honorable and useful position of wife. Whilst this is not the lot of all, many gain for themselves a good degree of comfort and happiness, and wear the most precious of all ornaments—a good name.

No doubt, many are hindered from entering on a successful career from a feeling of false pride. They could learn a trade or engage in a business of a certain kind, but it lacks caste. It is too common. They want an occupation which is more than ordinarily respectable—something which, according to the current notions of men, carries with it the idea of genteel and honorable. This they will follow, or nothing. If such a situation is not open—and it cannot be open to all—they will accept none. The frequent result is, none is chosen, and nothing ever comes of it. The years when a foundation for subsequent industry and prosperity is to be laid glide away, and life is a failure, or, at best, only a partial success. The same is true of any kind of common employment. Work of certain kinds can be had, but it is considered too menial, or the wages are deemed inadequate. Where such considerations are allowed to rule, disappoint-

ment, sometimes want, often evil habits, and sorrow and failure follow.

Let us learn from the example of Ruth. She was not ashamed of her humble lot, nor did she shrink from the hard necessities which it imposed. To go into the fields and glean was an admission of her poverty. It was to gain but little reward for much toil. But she was not hindered by such considerations. It was not in her power to fix her wages. She was poor, but this she could not help, nor was she ashamed of it. There is no disgrace in being poor. As long as we do right and preserve our good name, we may stand erect in the presence of any one. She did not refuse to do the work her hands found to do, though it betokened her poverty, and even exposed her to the possibility of unfriendly treatment from the owners and the reapers of the fields in which she desired to glean. Here were resolution and courage to dare and do, qualities which are sometimes necessary for self-help in this selfish and unsympathetic world. An honorable subsistence often demands the utmost pluck to gain it. But when this pluck is once fully tested and demonstrated, it is admired and rewarded.

Of this resoluteness and steadfastness of purpose, the life of Ruth is a brilliant example. She may have hoped for more friendly assistance from the friends and relatives of her late husband, and if not

from them, from the people of God with whom she had chosen to live. Her own heart glowed with benevolent feelings for mankind, and she may have justly expected that her kinsfolk by marriage, and her neighbors whose faith she had espoused, would treat her with kind consideration. But her life opened in Bethlehem apparently dark and full of discouragement. It had one source of cheer and comfort. She enjoyed the sympathy and love of her noble mother in law, and this was about the only bright and sunny fact in her desolate life, aside from the comfort and happiness she enjoyed in the assurance that the favor and peace of God were with her. But the filial and religious purpose to "cleave" to Naomi, and to share all her fortunes, was unchanged by any subsequent disappointments and hardships encountered by her. Almost any ordinary character would have been completely discouraged. She would have argued that the death of her husband freed her from further obligations to Naomi, that she could not be expected to dwell in a land of strangers, or among her husband's kinsmen, who felt no practical sympathy for her, and there toil in poverty and neglect, when she could return to her father's house and enjoy ease and abundance. But she did not reason thus. She had deliberately made up her mind to trust in the God of Israel, and to dwell with His people. She had counted the cost before she took

this step, and she was not now to be turned aside from a course which she knew to be right and good, because great hardships confronted her. These difficulties lay at the beginning of the new path on which she entered. She will not be turned out of it by them, but she will bravely surmount them. Such an unyielding adherence to a right course of life ought to be maintained by every one. Once we set our faces Zionward, we should not turn backward for any difficulties and hardships. Better bear the cross in weariness and suffering on the way to eternal life than be borne along on beds of roses on the road which leads to eternal death. Better live among the people of God in loneliness and poverty than to enjoy the companionship and abundance of the wicked. And if there is anything in which we should show unalterable purpose, a purpose which misfortune, persecution, abuse, and death cannot compel us to change, it is the purpose to serve God, to keep our covenant with Him unbroken, and to hold fast our title to eternal life. Ruth's trials and discouragements could not drive her to deny her faith, or to desert the people of God. Such should be the constancy of every believer.

We have also in the conduct of Ruth a conspicuous example of faith. She started out in the morning to glean, without knowing whither to go. No doubt, in her uncertainty, she asked God to

direct her, as every pious person should do on going forth to the duties of the day. The Lord heard her prayer and guided her footsteps, and brought her to the fields of Boaz, a near kinsman of her late husband, a man of wealth and of generous impulses. This might seem accidental to some, but it was all ordered from above. Of course Ruth acted without design, for she could not know which were the fields of Boaz, as the land in Syria is not fenced, and the boundary lines are indicated only with stones, called landmarks, set up at intervals. The result of this fortunate circumstance of her coming into the field of Boaz to glean, must be left for consideration in another chapter. But we do not wish to dismiss the subject without a few reflections at this place on the principle which underlies this occurrence.

Ruth is far from being the only person who has started out to seek employment under great trial and perplexity, not knowing whither to go. But there is a world-wide difference in the state of mind with which this is done. Some are merely guided by a sort of instinct which drives them forth to seek their daily bread—to provide for their urgent wants—whilst others go forth with a calm trust in Divine Providence, feeling sure that God will open the way and give success. He who enters upon any pursuit and feels that God is with him, can go forward confidently. God will direct his footsteps

and give him success. It may be accompanied with trials and disappointments, but it will have a joyful and prosperous ending. He who trusts in God and does his duty prospers more than he anticipates. His prosperity may not always be of a temporal character. Reverses may come, losses may be sustained, afflictions may be experienced; but with every earthly sorrow and misfortune, the title of eternal life will be made more sure, and the future inheritance in the kingdom of heaven will be enlarged. The supreme good aimed at by the child of God is never missed. For success in this life we know of no better rule than to trust in God and do our duty, and this same rule will secure for us the true and imperishable riches of the world to come. The God whom we acknowledge, to whom we look for guidance and aid, is infinite in resources, and is able to bless us beyond all we can ask or think. None that have trusted in Him and served Him have ever been forsaken or unrewarded. In this life He will care for us, and in the life to come He will crown us with glory and honor.

It is a pleasing thought to the faithful, that however lonely they may be, God is with them; that however helpless and defenceless they are, God cares for them and protects them; that however great their need may be, God provides for them; that however perplexed and uncertain they may be, God leads and directs them in safe paths, if so

be that they seek His guidance; and that however much they may be neglected or deserted by their fellowmen, God never leaves nor forsakes them. It is in the day of sorrow and adversity that God especially befriends His people. Therefore, never lose heart, dear reader, if you are a child of God. Never yield to discouragement. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Only trust in Him. Be sure He is near you in the darkness of trial and affliction and you will not be afraid, neither will your strength fail. Reach your hand toward Him in childlike faith, and He will take hold of your hand and lift you up; He will lead you and sustain you.

There is no doctrine more comforting and helpful than that of Divine Providence. If you believe this you will never lose courage or yield to despair under the severest trials and misfortunes. If your means are scanty, remember what is promised in God's unfailing word: "Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." If your path is dark and you know not whither to direct your steps, the Divine word again comes to your aid and says, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

BOAZ MEETING RUTH.

And, behold, Boaz came from Beth-le-hem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: and she said, Let me glean, I pray you, and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, save that she tarried a little in the house. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither pass from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thy sight, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to take refuge. Then she said, Let me find grace in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken kindly unto thine handmaid, though I be not as one of thine handmaidens. And at meal time Boaz said unto her, Come hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and they reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left thereof. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not. * * * So she gleaned in the field until even; and she beat out that she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

CHAPTER V.

BOAZ MEETING RUTH.

THE scene in the harvest field, in which the friendly relations between Ruth and Boaz were formed, furnishes a beautiful picture of the simple manners of the East. There is much in it to admire and praise. The chief attraction, however, is the meeting of the gleaner and the proprietor amid the sheaves of the reapers, their informal introduction to each other, and the high regard which Boaz at once felt for Ruth. It seems to be an instance of love at first sight. But every act on the part of each one is marked with becoming dignity and with a refined and delicate propriety.

We see in this connection a few strong outlines of the character of Boaz, which set him before us in a most pleasing and favorable light. He is not only pious, but he is also generous and gallant and humane. He greets his reapers as a God-fearing man, and conducts himself in their presence in an upright and becoming manner. His religion was not in word only, but also in deed and in truth. This appears clearly in the account which is given

of him in holy Scripture. The greeting with which he saluted his reapers when he came into the field, and the response which they gave to his salutation, show the friendly relations which existed between him and them as employer and employees. He who can go among his workmen and say sincerely, "The Lord be with you," will deal fairly with them, will give them just wages, and will also pay them promptly. And, on the other hand, the workmen who can respond with equal sincerity, "The Lord bless thee," will render due service for the wages given. Where such a feeling of good will and mutual interest is felt, there is no danger of conflict between capital and labor. There is a disposition on the part of those who represent each to make just and reasonable concessions, and mutually to seek each other's advantage. This kindly feeling and friendly sympathy is much more easily fostered and maintained in the simple life of the farmer and the rural craftsman than in the more extensive operations of manufacture and trade in our great centres of capital and industry. The husbandman and the small operator mingle much more freely and intimately with their employees than men who carry on much larger industries and employ many more laborers. Besides, where few are employed, the proprietor has better opportunities of becoming personally acquainted with each one and knowing his indi-

vidual trials and wants. But in the large industries, in which hundreds and thousands are employed, this intimate acquaintance and friendly sympathy cannot be formed. Especially is this the case in all corporate industries, for which the capital is furnished by persons who are not directly connected with them. The proprietors may live remotely from the scene of operation, and all the management be in the hands of agents. The law which must obtain in such case is not that of sympathy and kindly fellow-feeling, but of strict right and justice. The agent and the operative must each do his duty faithfully. Under such conditions, the influence of personal sympathy and desire of mutual welfare becomes subordinate, and the law of what is equal and just holds the highest place. The parties directly interested are usually unknown to each other, and care little for each other's comfort and prosperity. In the absence of high moral and religious convictions, there is nothing to hinder either one from the desire and attempt to take undue advantage of the other. The capitalist will require the highest dividends possible, if even the employee suffers in wages; and the employe will demand as much wages as he can get, and care little whether any profits accrue to those who furnish the money to carry on the industry which employs him. But there are certain business principles by which the whole question of

profits and wages can be regulated. Under our present state of civilization, with the immense industries which it calls into being and sustains, we can see no remedy for oppression on the part of capital and strikes on the part of labor, except that which is found in a fair and wise adjustment between the profits and the rewards of labor. The simple, friendly way of regulating this matter, as it was done in the days of Boaz, and as it is done largely in our own time among tillers of the soil and small operators in other lines of industry, is impracticable. It must be done on the basis of right principle, of a humane consideration for the welfare of the great army of toilers, in a word, on the basis of fairness and equity.

Boaz was a man of considerable wealth, but he was not above giving personal attention to his own affairs. He resided in Bethlehem, and he came to look after the men who were laboring for him in the field. He would know from his own observation how they wrought and conducted themselves, and in what condition the product was on which they spent their labor, whether it was small or abundant, of inferior or superior quality. He had, it seems, an overseer employed, who directed the workmen through the day and paid their wages at evening, but he did not leave everything to his foreman or steward. This was, perhaps, the secret of his prosperity. He was attentive to his own

affairs, and therefore he prospered. Men do not accumulate property by simple good fortune, but by industry, economy, and careful attention to business. A negligent farmer, or merchant, or manufacturer, who goes about seeking his pleasure, and leaves everything to the management of others, seldom prospers. He may prosper if he has a steward who is wise, capable, honest, and faithful in all things. But how often is this the case? Men of this stamp usually do business for themselves, and not for others. The same is true in religion. Our stores of grace will be small and our souls lean, and we will acquire no spiritual riches, if we do not give personal attention to prayer and the means of grace.

When Boaz came into his field to observe the progress the reapers were making, and to greet them with his blessing, his attention was attracted to the presence of a modest gleaner. Her general appearance and bearing impressed him favorably. There was something in her person and manners which told him that she was no ordinary pauper. The soul that is in us shows itself in our looks, in our thoughts, in our tastes and amusements. A mean soul cannot animate the body with great thoughts, with high purposes, noble conduct and dignified action. But when there is in this earthly tabernacle a noble nature, lofty purpose and a pure heart, these will manifest themselves in the coun-

tenance, the conversation and the manners of their possessor. The experienced eye of Boaz recognized in the lovely gleaner an individual of more than ordinary merit. He saw in her a person whom misfortune had reduced from a more favored condition in life to this state of dependence and want—one who was worthy of a better station. At once he feels a very great interest in her, and he asks his foreman who she is. Without a word or a look she had already deeply impressed the owner of the field in which she was gleaning, and had partly captivated his heart.

Sometimes people in humble circumstances complain that no one takes notice of them or cares for them, and that they can obtain no friendly recognition from those who are more favorably situated. In this fact, they find a great deal of discouragement. They feel that all their care and effort to lead a virtuous, honorable and meritorious life is unnoticed and unappreciated by those whose regard they value and desire. It must be admitted that a want of social position and advantages of fortune are oftentimes barriers to the friendly recognition and the due acknowledgment of merit, but they are not insuperable barriers. There are graces of person, of mind and of character which outweigh everything else, and these often win against all other odds. The charms of true womanhood and the dignity and worth of true manhood

are almost omnipotent in the contest for social recognition and favor, and must triumph. This truth is illustrated in the life of Ruth and of many others whom the reader may know. Ruth made no effort to attract the attention of Boaz. *Her* circumstances were greatly against her. Her employment was evidence that her lot was among the dependent poor. Yet she made this man of wealth and station feel interested in her, and inquire about her. How did she do it? No doubt nature had done much for her. She was attractive in her person. This was much in her favor. But this was not all. There was connected with her personal beauty, true womanly grace and modesty. It was the way she did her work and behaved herself in the presence of others in her trying situation, more than anything else, that excited the special interest of Boaz in her. A woman with the charms of personal beauty, but without prudence, modesty and character, can gain and hold no favorable consideration with sensible men. Our greatest power lies first in a pure heart. Unconsciously our manners flow and derive their quality from the state of the heart. Our conduct, especially when we are off our guard, will be but a reflection of what we really are in our inmost nature. If we are good, true, faithful and worthy in our moral being, our worth and excellence will appear in our conversation and manners. A superior nature will shine

out of the eyes, beam in the face, ring in the tones of voice, and reveal itself in the movements of the body. Genuine good manners proceed from a genuine good heart, and good manners go a long way in attracting the favorable regard of others. Of course, artificial manners, polite conduct assumed as an outer garment to hide the vile vestments underneath, is a fraud, because it would make us believe that the inner life is as gracious as it is represented to be outwardly. Manners are valued not only because they are pleasing in themselves, but especially because they reveal the soul which shapes and orders them. They set before our mental eye a jewel far brighter and more precious than that which may dazzle the natural eye, as part of the outward ornament of dress. Manners are deeply significant. It is hard to believe that a blunt, rude person is really refined in nature and kind in heart. Let us "keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." As the heart is, so will we be, in all that is true and real in our life. First let the heart be true and clean and good, and then be true to its promptings, and the life will not lack the winning grace which will gain friends and command the esteem of others.

But where is the evidence of Ruth's politeness? Are we not simply drawing a fancy sketch and throwing around her an ideal grace and attractiveness? We have already noticed her piety, the no-

bility and excellence of her character, and her admirable behavior towards her mother in law. We see her now in another sphere, and we expect one who has behaved so well at home to do herself credit abroad. She enters a field as a gleaner. The situation must be very embarrassing to her. She knows not as yet the owner of the field. The young men—the reapers, the binders, the maidens—all are strangers to her. She is not certain whether she will be allowed to remain and glean. The reapers, no doubt, glance significantly at each other as she enters. But her nobler nature comes to her support. She braces herself for the trial. She does not shrink away to the corner of the field and begin to glean until she is ordered away. She will not in this sneaking, cowardly way gain a partial advantage which otherwise may be totally denied her. But she goes modestly to the foreman and politely requests the privilege to glean. The form of her request is so respectful, so dignified, so appropriate, that no gentleman could refuse it. "I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves." Her request was granted, and so quietly and industriously did she attend to her work that when the owner of the field inquired about her, his foreman could answer, "She hath continued even from morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house;" that is, in the booth put up in the field for shelter from the heat of the sun and for refreshment.

Ruth's star now begins to rise. It would seem that her graceful manners had won the good will both of the foreman and of Boaz. One secret of all this is, that God's favor was with her. She was a daughter of faith and prayer, and the blessing of God was on her life and her labors. Where the Spirit of the Lord pervades the heart and life, there is a mysterious influence exerted to win friendly consideration and aid from others.

On hearing this favorable report concerning the comely gleaner, Boaz spoke to her in the most friendly and encouraging manner. We see the generousness of his heart in his kindly treatment of this poor and lonely woman. Ruth may have been near enough to have overheard the conversation between Boaz and his overseer, but she prudently kept silent. At least this seems to be the case from the manner in which the conversation between her and Boaz opens. "Hearest thou not, my daughter?" he asks. How soothing these kind words must have been to that sore heart. What power there is in the rich to encourage and help the poor! The heart of Boaz kindles with kindness as he speaks, and he proceeds to give Ruth advice, and tells her to glean only in his field, to remain close to his maidens, giving her equal privileges with his reapers to drink of the water which they had drawn, and directing them at the same time to treat her with becoming civility. This may have

been necessary, for it is not uncommon for reapers in that country, even at this day, to indulge in rude jests at the expense of the helpless gleaners. This seems to have been the humane and honorable motive of Boaz in advising Ruth to glean in his field only. He desired to shield her from the insults which might have been offered her elsewhere. It is one of the noblest traits of true manhood to protect a defenceless woman from insult and abuse.

This great kindness touched the heart of Ruth very deeply. It was so unlike what she had experienced since she left her own country. In accordance with the intense manners of the East, "She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, 'Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger!'" What a feeling of self-humility these words reveal! She claimed no favors on personal grounds, though she was most deserving in character and life.

But there were more than personal charms and agreeable manners to win favor for her from others. Her noble conduct towards her mother in law, her quiet submission to the will of God, her patient endurance of her sorrow and her poverty, her heroic choice of the God of Israel and of a residence among His people, had all come to the knowledge of Boaz, her wealthy kinsman. A worthy life lay

back of her attractive person and manners. If we would have the regard of others we must not only have natural gifts and graces, but must have also acquired worth. We must earn the good opinion of others by what we do—by our conduct. Do not fear that devotion to duty, that uprightness of life, that self-sacrifice for the good of others, that faithfulness in anything, will not come to the knowledge of others. Such a life is a light which cannot be hid. God knows it, and He will see to it that the right persons behold it.

Those were the days of stern trial for Ruth when she first came to Bethlehem. No one befriended her—not even her late husband's relations, not the people of God with whom she had cast in her lot. Yet that was just the time that the sterling qualities of her character were tested and revealed. It was then that the evidence of her true worth was brought out, and it was on this account that Boaz showed her such distinguished favor when he met her in the harvest field. This is evident in the answer which he gave to her inquiry as to the reason why she should have found favor in his sight. He said: "It hath been fully shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thy husband; and now thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not hitherto." The life of Ruth had not been hid from

the notice of her husband's friends. All these days of solitude, of trial, of struggle against adversity, of apparent neglect from those whose sympathy and help she had a right to expect and receive, her exemplary life was observed. Her worth was becoming known. One of the noblest of her near kinsmen saw her great merit, and was willing to acknowledge and reward it. He felt that it was but just that such a person should be treated with kindness and consideration, and in the warmth and piety of his heart, said to her, "The Lord God reward thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

The good will of Boaz, so beautifully expressed, did not end in mere words, but he made himself at once the Lord's agent to carry out his pious desire. He admitted his poor but deserving relative to certain privileges and benefactions. He invited her to his table. He was not aristocratic in his manners, as is the case with most men who are rich and of high standing in society. He dined with his reapers. The fare was very simple. The less ripe ears of barley were roasted, and then rubbed in the hand and eaten. This is considered to this day in the East very palatable food. Of this he gave to Ruth. She also shared in the bread, dipped in the sour wine, which was very cooling and refreshing in that hot climate. Thus the gleaner,

by the kindness shown by the owner of the field, is made equal to the maidens who bound the sheaves.

This thing of social caste! how circumstantial, and how unreasonable and unjust too, it often is in those it recognizes and those it ignores! Where true merit is found, it is the grossest form of selfishness and injustice not to recognize it and accord to it its rightful position in society on the part of those who occupy station and influence. The mere accident of birth and fortune should not outweigh talent, culture, and character. A *person* is of infinitely more value than the mere outward trappings of life.

But the generosity of Boaz did not stop even here. He commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not. And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean, and rebuke her not. Here we see a considerate and a commendable kindness. Boaz did not at once give Ruth an ephah of barley, as he might easily have done, and sent her home laden with the generous gift, but he made every necessary arrangement by which she could gather it during the day. He adopted the very best method of assisting and encouraging her—the method which is best suited to help the poor, and especially, poor relations. It is not by bestowing on them a yearly allowance, but by putting them

in the way of earning their own living, by starting them in business, or giving them employment and paying them generously for their services. In this way their self-respect is not compromised, their feeling of independence is maintained, and they are the happier and more useful for being profitably occupied. This should not be done in a patronizing manner, so as to make the person whom we are favoring feel that he is made partaker of our bounty, but it should be done in a straightforward, business-like way. The spirit of friendliness and kindness should run through every such transaction. Boaz did not overlook this principle. He did everything in the most delicate manner. In everything he spared the feelings of Ruth, and shielded her from the reproach to which her humble lot exposed her. He gave special orders to his reapers not to rebuke or reproach the humble gleaner. How honorable and thoughtful and magnanimous this order was! It is a bitter thing for the poor not only to gain their scanty living by hard toil, but especially to suffer reproach because of their humble lot and of the kind of labor by which they must win their daily bread. No one should be slighted or treated with small respect because his station in life may be lowly, or because of his employment, provided it be decent and useful. The rather, such should be encouraged and praised for their patient endurance, for their

self-denial, for their virtuous life under so great adversity and hardship and discouragement. Before God every calling is honorable, if it be pursued for the welfare of man and the glory of His name. All He asks of us is that we be faithful in the spheres in which He has placed us. If we fulfill this condition, we have His approval and blessing.

RUTH'S RETURN TO NAOMI.

RUTH ii. 18-23.

And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth and gave to her that she had left after she was sufficed. And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to-day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to-day is Boaz. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, the man is nigh of kin unto us, one of our near kinsmen. And Ruth the Moabitess said, Yea, he said unto me, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, and that they meet thee not in any other field. So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and she dwelt with her mother in law.

CHAPTER VI.

RUTH'S RETURN TO NAOMI.

ONE of the chief pleasures of life is the return home at evening after the day's work is done. If the toiler has a true home, he will meet some one there who will greet him pleasantly, enter into his sympathies, and cheer him with agreeable conversation. The blessings of home cannot well be exaggerated. It is a resting place for body and mind. It is a pleasant retreat from the active warfare of life, which must be waged day after day in the various pursuits that we follow. It is a refuge from all that is annoying, oppressive and galling in our intercourse with the outside world. There the commands of employer are not heard, and the eye of the overseer or taskmaster does not gaze. There the flowers of affection bloom, and the religious and social virtues of the soul are cherished and cultivated. There sorrows and joys are mutually shared ; the burdens of life lightened ; its roughness smoothed ; its bitterness sweetened; and its pleasures increased and multiplied. The Divine benevolence is revealed in the institution of marriage, by which He

"setteth the solitary in families" and establishes homes among men. Home is a bulwark against all evil, and a safeguard to all good. The person who has no true home to go to after the day's labor is done loses much of the pleasure and comfort of life. How glad Ruth must have been when she could leave the harvest field, and hide herself from the curious eyes and varied criticisms of the reapers and maidens in the humble home she had with Naomi in Bethlehem.

There is a valuable lesson in the simple fact that she brought home in the evening the results of her day's gleaning. All through the day she gathered her bread ear by ear, and after Boaz had given his liberal orders to his reapers, occasionally, handful by handful. At evening she had a number of sheaves, but her grain was yet in the ear. Her next duty was to take care of what she had thus gathered. She did not set it aside, and say, "I have done enough for one day; I will now return to my home and leave the barley sheaves to be beaten out at some other time," but she took measures at once to secure the fruit of her day's labor. She beat the grain out of the chaff and removed it and took it home. In so doing, she acted wisely. Many persons, after they have labored hard, lose the reward of their labor by not taking care of their earnings. Some value them too much and hoard them, and thus fail to enjoy the good of them or to do the

good with them that they should, whilst others value their earnings too little, and allow them to be wasted, or squander them in reckless expenditures. To know how to spend money is as important as to know how to earn it. If rightly used, it is a great blessing; if wrongly used, it may become a curse. We should make a wise use of all the gifts of Providence, and employ our temporal gains in ministering to our own comfort and welfare, in doing good to men and in honoring God. Many never bring their earnings home—at least a good part of them. They are spent for that which is not bread, and as a consequence, wives and children suffer want, and the housekeeping is embarrassed and uncomfortable. Let us learn from the example of this pious woman what to do with our wages. Let us bring them home to procure for the family bread, apparel and other comforts.

It is worthy of notice also that Ruth was not ashamed to carry the results of her day's toil with her. Of course, manners were more simple among those people than they are with us. But the principle of doing bravely what our hands find to do, is the same in all ages and everywhere. A false pride stands in the way of many a person's usefulness and comfort. There is a feeling that certain kinds of work are more genteel and respectable than other employments, that some avenues of trade, business and labor, are less refined and

honorable, and below the social caste of persons who are well thought of in life. We readily admit that there are employments which are dishonorable, degrading and censurable. But they are such as are immoral in themselves, or as work injury to society. But any kind of industry which belongs to the common work and welfare of human life, should not be looked upon as inconsistent with an honorable and respectable manhood or womanhood. A cobbler may be as noble-minded and as manly in his aims and principles as the favored son of fortune whose shoes he mends, and the servant girl may be as virtuous and as womanly in her instincts and aspirations as her mistress. These adverse distinctions in life are arbitrary, and not founded on deep inward principle and merit.

"Honor and shame from no condition rise;
Act well your part, there all the honor lies."

The positions we occupy are assigned to us by the appointments of Divine Providence, and whether they be considered lowly or exalted by our fellowmen, our honor and welfare lie in doing well what is assigned us in the spheres in which we are placed. Above all things, it should be our aim to enjoy the approval of God, and we know that He takes pleasure in us not for the kind of work we do, but for the manner and spirit with which we do it.

Don't be squeamish about work. No useful employment is disgraceful, but idleness is. The per-

son is to be pitied whose circumstances make some useful employment necessary, but who cannot find the kind of work which he thinks accords with his social position. He will suffer want and endless mortification rather than compromise his standing in the estimation of his friends by engaging in labor which is regarded as below his station. There is need of a revision of sentiment on this subject. Many persons are forced into a most distressing idleness on account of the false views which are entertained with reference to different classes of employments. Why not esteem all useful employment as honorable, as it really is, and thus throw off the petty tyranny which public opinion has so long exercised? Far be it from any one whose lot it is to labor in a sphere which she may regard as below her social position, far be it from her to esteem herself any the less on account of her work. If, like Ruth, you must glean, and by your occupation must reveal the straits to which your misfortunes have reduced you, maintain your self-respect; hold up your head in the consciousness of your innocence and worth. Count yourself as inferior to none on this account. Outward condition does not make merit. A harlot may live in ease, and dress in silks and jewels. A fool may be born in a palace, and ride in a sumptuous coach. You may have as good an understanding, as true and noble a heart, and as fair a character, as any of the

daughters of men whose fortunes may give them external advantages over you. We value persons by their *souls*, not by their *wealth* or *titles*. The rarest jewel is often hid beneath an humble garb. Do not undervalue it or throw it away. It will command its price some day. The modest gleaner was promoted in due time, and at this day she is known over half the world, while the silly people who may have laughed at her when she toiled in the field, and carried her ephah of barley through the streets of Bethlehem, were forgotten almost as soon as their graves were closed over them. Learn to value what is truly precious in life, and other objects will have less weight in determining your conduct. A life well lived is noble, honorable, and successful, whether it be public or private, exalted or lowly. Many of God's most useful servants and most illustrious saints were chosen from the lowly walks of life. There is a deeper principle of honor than that of mere circumstance. The good, the true, the faithful, are the honorable and estimable people of earth, no matter what may be their outward estate, and these will be honored on the great day of accounts when the righteous Judge shall mete out His rewards.

But Ruth possessed yet other virtues. She was self-denying and generous-hearted. Boaz had invited her to dine with him. His heart was very kindly disposed towards her, and he helped her very

generously—more than sufficient. She did not cast away any part of what remained over after she had completed her meal, but remembering the scanty allowance which her mother in law had for that day, she considerately kept it and carried it to her. Thus she "showed piety at home," as St. Paul calls the support of aged parents by their children.

It is surprising how many virtues are found in a person who truly fears God and serves Him. Having the heart right in the chief things, it is unconsciously right in the minor details of life. Without taking thought, it spontaneously does innumerable acts of love and righteousness. "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Ruth did so many good and noble things, not because she had a studied design, but because her heart was full of the fear and love of God.

The success of the day's gleaning as it appeared in the ephah of barley which Ruth brought home, somewhat surprised Naomi. She had a suspicion that her daughter in law had met with special kindness, and she asked, "Where hast thou gleaned today? and where wroughtest thou?" This inquiry was from no idle curiosity, or evil motive, but from a feeling of genuine interest in the fair gleaner. A parent has the right, yea it is his duty, to inquire where his child spends his time and how and with whom he spends it. This knowledge is necessary in order that the parent may be able to give the needful counsel, caution, encouragement, or re-

buke. Parents should know where their children are during the day, and especially at night. Ruth as a dutiful child frankly told her mother in law where she had gleaned that day and how she fared, not failing to mention the kindness which Boaz had shown her. Sons or daughters who have regard for their welfare will not conceal from their parents the paths in which they walk, so that they may guard them from danger on the one hand and assist them in surmounting difficulties on the other. Certainly Ruth lost nothing by letting Naomi know where she gleaned, and all about the kind things which the proprietor of the field had said to her. As a rule, daughters are gainers for making their mothers their confidants and advisers in social and other matters. No one else has a deeper interest in their welfare, and no one else will give such sincere and safe counsel. Much of the success and happiness of children depend on their asking and following the advice of their parents.

There is one feature of this charming history of Ruth which is clearly marked, and that is its intense religiousness. We see it in her firm resolve to live and die with Naomi, and to serve and trust in the God of Israel. We see it in her silent submission in the day of sorrow and adversity, and her patient endurance under neglect and poverty. We see it in the mutual greetings of Boaz and his reapers. We see it again when Ruth comes home

laden with the gatherings of her day's toil in the harvest field. The sense of gratitude is earnest, and the Giver of all good is duly acknowledged in the words of thanksgiving which were then spoken by Naomi—"Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and the dead." The piety which breathes in this sentence, and in the whole story of her life, has led a late writer to make the following reflections on it: "Despite centuries of oppression, division and religious decay, it breathes a lofty spirit to Jehovah, which appears at every turn. It is He who has given His people bread; He who deals kindly with the widow; He who grants her that she may rest in the house of a husband. But it is He who tries the children of men, and from whose hand afflictions go out against them. Indeed, He at times deals 'very bitterly,' even with those who love Him, but He is still their God, under whose wings they trust, and who recompenses man's work and gives him a full reward. He is no mere name to which to turn in formal rites, but a Father—the Friend and Protector, yet also, the sovereign Judge and Lord—demanding obedience and heavily punishing sin. That such conceptions still found a home in Israel, after more than four hundred years of moral and political degradation, and still filled the life of some at least with the thought of God, and of their race being His chosen people, was the guarantee

of future national regeneration. It was certain that, ever and again, such truths would assert themselves in the hearts of the nation, and bring with them political as well as moral renewal; the one, indeed, as the result of the other." "That so much worth and religious earnestness should still remain in the hidden nooks of the land was indeed the best pledge of its rise hereafter from the disasters of the present."

Naomi learned with delight that Ruth had gleaned in the field of Boaz and that she had found favor in his sight. She recognized him at once as a near kinsman, whose duty it was to redeem their land, to protect them in their rights, and to marry Ruth, as the widow of his next nearest relative. At least he was one of those near relatives. It appears that there was but one other who stood more nearly related to the late husband of Ruth than he.

When Ruth was about to leave the field of Boaz in the evening, he generously invited her to glean in his field. Naomi advised her to accept this generous invitation. It was best for her to do so, because if "she be found straying in other fields," she might not only run the risk of rude treatment, but displease him by a seeming indifference to his liberal offer. Moreover, the observant mind of Naomi had already discerned in the kind attentions which Boaz had given her daughter in law, the motions of a tender passion for her, which she desired to encourage and strengthen.

THE ENGAGEMENT.

RUTH iii. 1-18.

And Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee? And now is there not Boaz, our kinsman, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to-night in the threshing-floor. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the threshing-floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do. And she said unto her, All that thou sayest I will do. And she went down unto the threshing-floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet. And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman. And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter: thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not: I will do to thee all that thou sayest, for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman. And now it is true that I am a near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part; but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth: lie down until the morning. And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could discern another. For he said, Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor. And he said, Bring the mantle that is upon thee, and hold it: and she held it: and he measured six measures of barley and laid it on her: and he went into the city. And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her. And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me: for he said, Go not empty unto thy mother in law. Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not rest, until he have finished the thing this day.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ENGAGEMENT.

NAOMI had a very tender regard for Ruth. Her condition was such as to justly awaken feelings of pity. She was young and widowed and poor, and the lot of the widow in Syria to this day, under the most favorable circumstances, is sad and deplorable. She would, therefore seek a husband and a home for her—a rest from the hard toil and the pinching want to which her present condition subjected her. To this end she forms her plan and gives her instructions. No modern matchmaker could be more skillful than was Naomi, or maiden more modestly careful to do her best to please than was Ruth, as she "washes and anoints herself, and puts on her best clothes." Thus she makes ready to meet Boaz and captivate his heart.

The manner in which this meeting took place is so peculiar, and differs so radically from our customs, that we must suspend our judgment as to its modesty and propriety until we have considered the manners of that age and country. This we will do after we have stated the facts as they are furnished us in the sacred record.

The interview was planned by Naomi, and it was arranged that Ruth should go to the threshing-floor at evening, where she would meet Boaz, and claim from him the right of marriage. According to the customs of those people there was nothing bold or improper in this claim. It was so provided in their law, bearing the divine sanction, that when a brother died without issue, the brother of the late husband, or next nearest relative, in case of no living brother, was to marry the widow. Ruth was sent to the threshing-floor of Boaz, because he lodged there during harvest. The wheat or barley which was reaped during the day was beaten out in the evening and winnowed by the breeze which prevails after sunset. The farmer usually remained over night at the threshing-floor at this time, both to protect the grain, (for the threshing-floor was an open place in the field,) and also to superintend the winnowing. This duty, at so important a time, the master undertakes himself. Accordingly, Boaz, a man of considerable wealth and of social prominence, laid himself down to sleep on the barn floor, at the end of the heap of barley he had been winnowing, after having eaten and drunk with his men. Ruth was a silent observer, and unseen by Boaz. She marked the place where he lay down, and after he had fallen into the deep sleep which the weary enjoy, she stole quietly up to him and lay down at his feet. Singular as this conduct may

seem to us, it was according to the instructions of her mother in law, and to the simple manners of those people. To us it seems unbecoming and censurable, but it was not so considered by any of the parties concerned. It was doubtless in accordance with prevailing usage, and Ruth followed this course innocently, in order to remind Boaz of the duty which devolved on him as the near kinsman of her late husband. "Boaz probably slept on a mat, or a skin; Ruth lay crosswise at his feet, a position in which Eastern servants frequently sleep in the same chamber or tent with their masters, and if they want any covering, custom allows them that benefit from part of the covering on their master's bed." "Resting, as the Orientals do at night, in the same clothes they wear during the day, there was no indelicacy in a stranger, or even a woman, of putting the extremity of this cover over her." "She had already drawn part of the mantle over her, and she asked him now to do it, that the act might become his own. To spread a skirt (cloak) over one is, in the East, a symbolical action denoting protection. To this day, in many parts of the East, to say of any one that he had put his skirt over a woman is synonymous with saying that he married her, and at all the marriages of the modern Jews and Hindoos, one part of the ceremony is for the bridegroom to put a silken or cotton cloak around his bride." We insist here, that improper

and censurable as Ruth's conduct may seem to us, there was nothing indelicate in it, as judged by the customs of that age and people. So Boaz regarded it. When he discovered her presence he did not chide her or reproach her, but spoke approvingly, and pronounced her "Blessed of the Lord." He then sets his approval to her procedure by granting her request and testifying to her innocence, "for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman." The honorable repute of Ruth is a sufficient vindication of her conduct. Her motives were pure and right. Persons of her character do not seek questionable surroundings. And so Boaz understood her conduct. It was consistent with the honor and good name of both under the usages which were prevalent among them.

Yet the situation was of such a nature that the tongue of slander could easily take advantage of it, and use it to the scandal and injury of the innocent. Hence Boaz, in his desire to shield her and himself from needless suspicion and mischievous comment, advised her to return to her home before daylight. It is wise and right not to place ourselves in circumstances to which unfavorable suspicion may be attached, even if our motives are good and our conduct is unblamable. We should endeavor to live in such a manner that our good is not evil spoken of. But it is still better, if, unwittingly, or by unavoidable circumstances, we

are found in untoward surroundings, and the eye of suspicion discovers us, our known life is so honest and true that everyone who knows us will at once, as did Boaz with Ruth, declare us innocent. After all, our best vindication from injurious reports is a virtuous and a righteous life. Whilst our conduct should be guarded so as always to be free from the suspicion of impropriety, yet we have nothing to say in defence of that suspicious temper which almost makes a virtuous friendship between persons of opposite sex impossible without injurious remark and dark hints at a spotless reputation.

Ruth returned from the threshing floor of Boaz with satisfactory evidence of his appreciation of her virtues and claims. He assured her of his willingness to discharge his duties as a near kinsman, and sent her away with a liberal allowance of barley.

Blessings now begin to multiply upon the fair Moabite widow. At every step her cause prospers more than she expected. She has won the love and confidence of her late husband's kinsman, and she no longer lacks the comforts of life. Everywhere, in whatever she undertakes, the Divine blessing rests on her. She has feared God, trusted in Him and done right in days of adversity, and now the cloud which had lowered in her sky is scattered, and most cheering light shines on her path. She realizes the faithfulness of God's promise to those

who trust in Him. Verily, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." Whom the Lord blesses, is blessed indeed; His favor is worth more than all things else.

REMOVING LEGAL HINDERANCES.

RUTH iv. 1-8.

Now Boaz went up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the near kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down. And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down. And he said unto the near kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth the parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's: and I thought to disclose it unto thee, saying, Buy it before them that sit here, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know; for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it. Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. And the near kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance; take thou my right of redemption on thee; for I cannot redeem it. Now this was the custom in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning exchanging, for to confirm all things; a man drew off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbor: and this was the manner of attestation in Israel. So the near kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thyself. And he drew off his shoe.

CHAPTER VIII.

REMOVING LEGAL HINDERANCES.

WE are always gratified to learn that persons who have experienced much sorrow and misfortune, and who have been patient and faithful through it all, have at last been cheered and blest with bright and prosperous days. The sense of justice in us seems to call for such a turn in the fortunes of mankind. When those who have suffered many ills come at length to enjoy many blessings, we are agreeably impressed with the happy adjustment of the inequalities of life. But this is not always the case. It is often ordered differently by a wise and gracious Providence, and the course of affliction and adversity is allowed to run on unchanged to the end of life. When there is a meek and patient endurance of afflictions, and also believing prayer for their removal, and yet no special token of Divine favor is manifested, either in the bestowment of temporal comforts or in relief from the cause of suffering, we may be quite certain that the same merciful Disposer who appoints them in the beginning sees that it is best they should not

be taken away. There is much in this reflection to reconcile the unfortunate and afflicted to their lot. God intends to work for them the greater happiness and glory through their present sufferings. To a good man, no truth gives more patience and submission under trials and afflictions, than that it is the will of God that he should bear them.

We are glad to come to that period in Ruth's life, when good fortune overtakes her and she is a second time made happy. But a few years ago she was introduced to us a joyful bride. Her introduction was so abrupt that we had little time for acquaintance with her, and for the growth of those personal attachments which would make us feel interested in her marriage. We scarcely thought of the happiness she felt and the bright hopes she entertained when she became a wife, nor did we sympathize with her as deeply then as we can now since we know her better, in the sorrow she felt when those bright hopes were so soon blasted and destroyed.

For one so young, she had seen a good deal of sorrow. Her girlhood had no doubt been as pleasant and happy as it could be in a heathen country, with heathen sentiments and customs. Her marriage with Mahlon was a narrow belt of light shining for a brief period across her path, and then it was deeply shaded by the solemn gloom of bereave-

ment, widowhood, poverty and loneliness. In all right marriages, there is always felt a spirit of joy and hope, which fills the future with bright pictures of contentment, peace and happiness. Yet no one knows how soon bereavement sorrows, and other trials will cast their deep shadows on the bright and beautiful scene which the ardor of youthful fancy had created. Marriage has its cross, as well as its crown of ivy and flowers. It is a step to be taken thoughtfully as well as hopefully. Life is not a mere dream, but a stern reality. Ruth had forsaken father and mother, the home of her childhood and the friends of her youth. But how great and unexpected the change which comes over her in a few years! Still young and full of hope and warm impulses, she is widowed and separated from her youthful companions, and made the associate of an aged relative, the mother of her late husband, who herself is saddened and burdened with the sorrows of widowhood and poverty. Deprived of her natural support, her necessities compel her to go into the harvest field of one who is as yet a stranger to her, to glean, and thus, under the scorching rays of a Syrian sun, to gather her scanty bread. We can scarcely imagine a case more pitiful and unfortunate, and more calculated to draw out our sympathies towards her. And her condition touches us all the more sensibly because, under all her adversity and sorrow, she is so uncom-

plaining, submissive, dutiful, affectionate, devotedly pious,—so single-hearted and determined in her purpose to do right and to serve God.

We are always glad to hear that good fortune comes back to such a person. And so it turned out with Ruth. The favorable regard which Boaz had conceived for her from the first time he had seen her, ripened into a noble and unselfish love, and he engaged himself to perform all that his near relationship required of him. This was virtually the same as an engagement to marry her. At this point in her life, her humility and poverty end.

The liberal gift of Boaz already supplies her present wants. She does not need to return to the field and glean. By the advice of her mother in law, she remains at home and quietly waits to see what will become of the marital negotiations which have been so auspiciously inaugurated. She abides in her humble home as the prospective wife of one of the richest and most influential men in all Bethlehem.

But there is a slight hinderance to this expected union. It is often the case that some obstacle must be removed before this interesting contract can be definitely made and fully consummated. Ruth has one kinsman more nearly related to her than Boaz. Under the Mosaic law, it is his duty to redeem the property of Naomi and Ruth and to

marry the latter, and Boaz will not enter into any final engagement to do either, until the nearer relative declines to perform his duty, or as it would seem in this case, claim his privilege. What would be his decision in the matter, was, no doubt, a source of uneasiness both to Ruth and Boaz, as they seem to have been mutually pleased with each other, and it would have been a grievous sacrifice of sentiment to forbid the marriage of two hearts, in order to carry out a legal observance and formally join two persons in a mere outward union. Fortunately for Boaz, as it appears, the other kinsman had never seen Ruth. An acquaintance with her might have brought about a very different result. But in the absence of all personal attraction and sympathy, the nearer kinsman looked on the proposed marriage from a purely business point of view. To redeem the inheritance of Naomi and Ruth, would not, in his judgment, be a profitable investment, even with Ruth included in the bargain, and he declines to do as the law requires. Perhaps he was unwilling to marry Ruth because she was poor, and a stranger, a Moabitess. To the great happiness of Boaz, the nearer kinsman of Ruth refused to act in accordance with the Mosaic law, and thus the way was open for Boaz to redeem the estate of Elimelech, which seems to have been mortgaged many years previous to that date, and to make Ruth his wife. Boaz

would have no other than a legal marriage with Ruth.

In this matter, he acted not only honorably, but righteously. His love for Ruth was not a wilful passion which blindly sought her hand, regardless of the honor and welfare of both of them, but a rational affection. The man who marries clandestinely and in violation of the law, does so to the disgrace and injury both of himself and his affianced wife. In such case, the affection of some heart is blasted, and the withering blight of iniquity will fall on another so soon as the fraud and crime are discovered. The person who thus victimizes and ruins an innocent and confiding maiden deserves the contempt and execration of his fellowmen. Our laws against offences of this nature are far too lenient. The man or woman who sows the seeds of disappointment, misery and ruin by disregarding the sacred rights and obligations of matrimony, should be punished severely. It is a fearful crime to trample upon the heart of another, and to destroy its peace and happiness for life.

It may be proper to state here that the Mosaic law required the oldest brother, yet unmarried, or the next of kin in case no brother survived, to redeem the estate of a deceased brother or kinsman, if it was involved, and to marry his widow if she was still childless. This was a very benevolent law. It left no room for surviving relatives or de-

signing and covetous persons to strip the widow of the property on which she depended for a living, or to distress her on account of the debts which might be upon it. Instead of taking a mean advantage of the widow's helpless condition and forcing the property into market to pay the remaining indebtedness, and thus to acquire it at a low figure, as is sometimes done, he is required to assume the debt and take her for his wife. This law is a great kindness and protection to the widow.

It was especially wise and merciful in the East, where the state of widowhood is so very sad and distressing,—where the unfortunate widow must not only bear the sorrows of bereavement, but also the slights of her own relations and often the hardships and privations of poverty. In countries where the principles of justice are so well defined and the laws of humanity are so generally recognized as in our own, this peculiar law of Moses is not so necessary. And yet with all our well-defined laws and our generous sentiments in favor of the widow, it is often the case that her rights are not protected, and that she is defrauded and robbed by wicked and designing men. A more dastardly crime could not have been alleged against the canting Pharisees by our Lord than the accusation that they were "robbers of widows' houses." The person who takes advantage of a widow's inexperience in business, and especially if she have a

family to rear and educate, to deprive her of her lawful property and means of support, should be branded as a thief and a robber, and should be so treated by his fellow-men. There are too many crimes of this character overlooked or condoned, because they are veiled under a pretext of legal right, or lingering processes of law. No matter how the foul iniquity is perpetrated, the *act* should be held as cowardly, unmanly and infamous. The man who thrives on the wrongs he commits against the widow and the orphan, should be considered as one of the most despicable of sinners. Be not deceived. God will judge the man who oppresses the widow and the orphan.

THE MARRIAGE.

RUTH iv. 9-22.

And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day. And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is to come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephrathah, and be famous in Beth-lehem: and let thy house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman. So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife; and he went in unto her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a near kinsman, and let his name be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. And the women, her neighbors, gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez begat Hezron, and Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab, and Amminadab begat Nashon, and Nashon begat Salmon, and Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, and Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARRIAGE.

THE marriage customs of the East are rather mechanical and formal. This sacred union is determined between parents or guardians, and suitors, in a very business like manner. It looks very much like an ordinary contract, in which a man pays a stipulated amount and then obtains a right and title to his wife. Very little regard is had to suitability. The idea of divorce among those people on the ground of a want of congeniality would never be thought of. Sometimes persons well advanced in life are espoused to mere children. The bride is seldom allowed to have any choice in the matter. Woman is not allowed to exercise any right in this important contract, in which her happiness is so vitally concerned. Whatever advantages may inhere in such a custom, we think that our own, open as they are to mistakes and abuses, are far preferable and better. With all our ill-advised, hasty, injudicious, and ill-assorted marriages, a vast deal more happiness and contentment are secured under our customs than under those of the East. And were it not for our vicious

literature, for a blamable neglect of due caution and instruction in regard to this important step in life from the pulpit and at the fireside, there would be fewer unhappy marriages, more domestic happiness, and a smaller number of divorces. There are many people who are unfit to marry. They have not the character or the habits which will enable them to be good husbands and wives. Many are too indolent and shiftless and morally vicious to enter into this holy state. They are totally unworthy of its sacred pledges and duties, and of its honors and joys. Marriage between such, means speedy regret, great unhappiness, squalor, unfaithfulness, and a ruined home. To enter into the marriage relationship with such persons, is the rashest and the worst folly.

But let us return to Boaz and see how he conducted his suit for the hand of Ruth. Eager as he was to make her his wife, he would not take a mean advantage of the man who had a prior claim to his own. He was determined to act fairly and honorably in the matter. It takes a noble and a manly nature to place a prize so dear in possible jeopardy out of a sense of right and fairness to another. It is not always done. But nowhere does the spirit of true chivalry find a sterner test or a better field for the display of its greatness and honor.

The procedure of Boaz was open and above-board. He called together the elders of the city, who con-

stituted a sort of court in cases of justice and equity, the very next day after he had acknowledged the justness of Ruth's claim. As was customary, this court met in the gate of the city, a public place, where cases were usually heard. It seems that Boaz was himself the chief officer of the city, and that he presided over the court which he had called together. Ten men from among the elders are chosen as witnesses. The only man who had a superior claim over him to the hand of Ruth, is brought forward. The case is stated to him, and an opportunity given him to discharge his duties as required by the law and claim the beautiful prize which went along with the act. Notwithstanding, he refuses to redeem the inheritance of his kinsman. All hindrances having now been removed, Boaz openly declared to the elders and the people, that he would discharge the obligations of the next nearest relative, redeem the property of Elimelech, and make Ruth his wife. And they were witnesses of the transaction.

Here were true independence and noble manhood. Boaz was not ashamed publicly to recognize and honor true worth in one who was lowly and without recognized social position. Ruth was poor. She was a widow and a stranger—a woman of another race—and therefore not regarded with favor by the friends and neighbors of Boaz. Besides this, she was a gleaner in his field. She occupied a posi-

tion lower than one of his hired servants. She was rated among the dependent poor. But however humble her lot, Boaz has learned to know her excellence of mind and character, and he fearlessly declares to the elders—the honorable men of his city—his purpose to marry her. What a sensation such an act usually produces! How people exclaim, and express their surprise and censure! But what is wrong in the act? A man of means and station marries a worthy young woman who is endowed with every womanly grace and excellence,—only she lacks fortune, and perhaps a distinguished family name. Is this, then, to be the standard for estimating the worth of a bride? Is a man's choice of a wife to be approved only on the ground of pecuniary and social advantages? Are not the graces of mind and heart far more valuable?

Boaz would not allow his judgment of the merits of Ruth, or his relations to her, to be influenced and determined by a false sentiment. He did not attempt to conceal his attachment to a worthy woman or his union with her. His marriage with her was open and distinctly avowed. He was not ashamed of Ruth, because of her poverty and lack of social prestige. He saw in her character what was more precious than rubies, and he felt that in honoring her he honored himself. As a prominent citizen, he did a noble public service by showing appreciation for true worth.

We admire the generous frankness of Boaz. There was nothing hidden in his marriage. There ought to be no secret marriages. This important act should be done in the presence of witnesses. Such a custom would prove advantageous in many ways. The example before us is especially valuable because it shows great care to have everything so understood and arranged as to make this marriage altogether legal, proper and honorable. No one should think of entering into this holy relationship either by deception, cunning, or fraud. A marriage alliance thus formed could never be satisfactory or happy. The treachery which brings it about would itself be a skeleton standing at the domestic hearth, and blighting its joy with its horrible grin.

You will notice that the transaction at the gate of the city, though it involved the transfer of property from one person to another, was made without any written contract or deed. It was simply witnessed to by the elders. This was deemed sufficient. It was the usual way of disposing of property among these people. Without any further guarantee or any instrument of writing, the purchaser held peaceable possession of his property. This fact shows a wholesome sentiment among them in regard to the right of ownership. With us, custom is different. A deed, or title, is necessary; and it is convenient also. But it is not necessary in all

cases, in the sense that a transaction of this nature would not be safe without it. There are still men to be found whose word is as good as their bond, and who would never lay claim to property which they have sold, though they might have the legal pretext of a right. What they agree to, they do, and they would scorn to do a dishonorable or a dishonest act. Yet in the complications of our social and civil life, legal papers are important and necessary, and should always be drawn up and given. Attention to this matter will guard against loss, and often prevent litigation, ill-will and wrong. It is safest and best to provide against disagreeable and hurtful contingencies. It should be the unvarying rule to take a receipt when you settle your account, and to demand legal documents when you enter into transactions of any importance. This is the only safe way. He who neglects it is in danger of trouble and loss. Never do business on the easy terms of friendship, but on strictly business principles.

Our attention is attracted by the simplicity of the marriage ceremony by which Boaz and Ruth were made man and wife. It was merely a declaration on his part, in the presence of witnesses, to make Ruth his wife. The word used by him is "*purchased.*" This is to us a harsh word when used in this connection. But it did not really have this hard, practical, unsentimental meaning in the mind

of Boaz or of those whom he addressed. The "*purchased*" had reference more particularly to the property which he bought as a necessary condition to the marriage. The buying of the estate of Elimelech, and his immediate heirs, Chilion and Mahlon, now deceased, was only a means to an end. It was the main encumbrance to the marriageable prospects of Ruth. Without this "purchase," the marriage could not have been consummated. The only other part of the ceremony is the "blessing." It seems no priest was present to perform this act, but, we are told, "all the people that were in the gate, and all the elders, said, 'We are witnesses.'" Then followed the good wishes, which are equivalent to a blessing pronounced by the whole congregation. The "blessing" was a very significant part of the ceremony. It not only expressed the good-will of the people, but it enlisted the Divine benevolence and aid in their favor. God's blessing should be invoked on all our transactions, but especially should it be sought in an engagement of such moment as the union of two persons in holy wedlock, an estate in which the continual care and favor of God are so much needed.

Marriage is not the light and romantic thing which many thoughtless persons suppose it to be, but a very serious and important matter. No step in life involves greater consequences, or has a stronger bearing on a man's success and happiness.

It not only determines a man's career and status in this world, but it has immense influence in determining what his state shall be in the world to come. Let no one enter into the married state "lightly or unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly and in the fear of God."

There are sometimes providences which seem to us arbitrary. But they bear this appearance to us only because we are unacquainted with the causes and influences which enter into them. David, for instance, is selected from an obscure calling and anointed King of Israel. At the time of his anointing, there appears no more reason for choosing him for his honorable and responsible position than a thousand others. But in the light of events we may discover sufficient reasons for this choice. He had the prowess, the patriotism and the godly fear and trust, which fitted him for the gigantic task of subduing the enemies of his people, establishing the throne of the house of Judah, and giving a new impulse to the religious life and the national hopes of Israel. Ruth and Boaz were his great-grandparents. In their honorable lives and noble characters, we can trace the elements of greatness which would make them capable of being the ancestors of illustrious kings. David was chosen king because God saw in him a noble and a devout spirit. And

the piety, the courage, the endurance, the decision of character which he displayed, were already in the heart of his noble great-grandmother, as appears from her heroic conduct when she chose the Lord for her God, and in obedience to that choice, left her kindred and native land to dwell with the people of God; from her patient submission to the Divine will when she was bereft of her husband and left to toil in sorrow and loneliness for her daily bread; from her noble life, her exalted character and her unwavering trust in God. David sprang from a God-fearing and a praying ancestry.

In due time God put increasing honors on the name of Ruth. So we sometimes see persons suddenly loom up into prominence, and we are tempted to think that it is accidental, or fortuitous; or that God is partial, and confers special favors on an elect class of persons. But we do not know the antecedents of these fortunate ones. Washington would never have gained his eminent place in history but for the prayers and counsels of his wise and devoted mother. In God's providences, effects have their causes. Great men rise from a fountain which lies back of them, and high up among the sublime cliffs of truth, righteousness and godly fear. This high source of greatness is maternal rather than paternal. Eminent men owe their distinction to their mothers more than to their fathers. The house of David had its highest spring in Ruth.

The lineage of Boaz and Ruth is very interesting and instructive. The former was the son of Rahab, the Canaanitess who protected the spies whom Joshua had sent out to gain information concerning the people of Canaan. His mother was, therefore, a woman of Canaan, and his father a Jew. Ruth was a daughter of Moab, and also of a nation who were not among God's chosen people. Thus there was mingled in the veins of the royal line of David, the blood of the nations which, for the time, were excluded from the Divine promise. This mingled blood of Israel and of the Pagan world flowed in the veins of Mary, the lineal descendant of David and the mother of Jesus. In this natural blending of races, we have an intimation of God's purpose to redeem and save men of every nation, both Jews and Gentiles, who call on His name and accept His grace. This purpose has been fully declared in the Gospel: Whosoever believes on the Son of God shall be saved.

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